

Help for Montana Seniors

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Managing High Heating Costs

Just as the first few high heating bills hit Montana residents, the Montana Department of Commerce, Board of Housing would like to remind older homeowners of a program that can assist if the burden becomes too much to bear. The Reverse Annual Mortgage (RAM) program allows qualified homeowners 68 and older to receive a low interest loan for a wide variety of uses, including help with increased heating bills and weatherization projects. "What's so great about this program is it uses as its foundation a lifetime of hard work. You bet we're proud to help people who have given so much to this state," Governor Brian Schweitzer said.

Cutting Red Tape

The RAM program, started in 1989, is designed to use equity in people's homes to pay for increasing costs to health care, medication, heating, taxes, and home maintenance during retirement. Repayment on the loan does not occur until the house is sold. Justin Schedel, who administers the program, explained that the application process is designed to make it easy for people to apply. "We really tried to take the red tape out of this. All that needs to happen is for people to call and we'll walk them through it," Schedel said. Montana Department of Commerce staff can be reached at 1-800-761-6264 concerning this program.

Homes Equity Put to Good Use

While use of this program has increased over the years, there is still room to grow. Montana has historically had a high rate of homeownership, staying above the national figures since 1900. Today homeownership in Montana is at 70% (higher in rural areas), and for many people their home remains their largest investment. Tom Fowler of Conrad strongly recommends the program to persons who need to supplement their retirement. "For folks who've been farming or ranching, or working a lot of other Montana type jobs, it can get tough to save up all that you're going to need. With this program you can use the equity in your house without breaking the bank," Fowler said. "It sure worked for us, I say give 'em a call."